The Web: A Source of Health Information for Seniors at Neighborhood Networks Centers

The World Wide Web has become an important tool for seniors seeking information about health and health-related issues. Neighborhood Networks centers, equipped with computers and Internet access, link these seniors with the kind of relevant information that can keep them healthy and productive, regardless of their age.

At the Golden West Neighborhood Networks Center in Colorado, for example, a 77-year-old resident used the Internet to access health information and it changed her life. The information helped her make informed decisions about changing her diabetes regimen, treating an Achilles tendon injury and understanding the cause of her heart palpitations. She also became more informed about standard medications and alternative remedies. As a result of her new knowledge, she and her physician can cooperatively plan and manage her health care.

Do seniors have unique health care needs?

Certainly. Today, thanks to technological advances in medicine, Americans are living longer, healthier lives. Many seniors, though, must manage multiple health conditions that potentially can decrease their likelihood of living independently.

Approximately 73 percent of hospital patients over the age of 65 receive home health care after their discharge, according to the Centers for Disease Control. And, seniors on average have 11 physician contacts per year.

There is an enormous amount of decision-making required for seniors to stay healthy and independent. Health information retrieved from the Internet can promote good decision-making. Accessing the Internet may not be a cure-all but it does provide practical tools about health and health-related issues.

What kinds of health care information can seniors access?

Using computers, one can research the safety of new medications, chat with others who have similar conditions and join online support groups, investigate alternative therapies and learn about health insurance benefits. It is also possible to consult with a physician online. By accessing scientific journals online, one can research the latest advancements in medicine and surgery.

Where to find health information online?

Here are some websites that seniors at Neighborhood Networks centers may find especially informative.

- **Disease-specific Organizations.** For questions relating to heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, or cancer, be sure to check out the American Heart Association at *www.americanheart.org*, the American Lung Association at *www.lungusa.org*, the

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Neighborhood Networks Facts...

WHAT: Neighborhood Networks is a community-based initiative launched by HUD's Office of Multifamily Housing in September 1995 that encourages the development of resource and computer centers in HUD-assisted and/or -insured housing.

- More than 620 centers in operation*
- Thousands of business, community and government partners
- More than 744 properties with centers in planning*

WHO: Serves HUD-assisted and/or -insured housing residents, owners, managers, partners and communities.

*as of 08/00

American Diabetes Association at *www.diabetes.org*, and the American Cancer Society at *www.cancer.org.* Don't miss the Arthritis Foundation at *www.arthritis.org* or the Alzheimer's Association at *www.alz.org/* if these are issues of concern. All of these sites provide information about the latest research, support for patients and families, and plenty of statistics.

■ **Medicaid and Medicare.** For information about federal health insurance benefits, be sure to visit the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) website. HCFA administers both Medicaid *(www.hcfa.gov/medicaid/medicaid.htm)* and Medicare *(www.medicare.gov)*.

■ **Government Agencies.** The federal government provides some of the most reliable information on aging. Check out the National Institutes of Health's Age Pages at *www.nih.gov/nia/health/pubpub/pub pub.htm* for fact sheets written for seniors on a variety of health-related topics. Also, the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Aging produces fact sheets and some pertain to health issues. Be sure to visit the Department of Health and Human Service's *www.healthfinder.gov* website. It is considered a premier government-sponsored website on health-related information.

■ **Medical Research.** Prominent medical institutions, such as the Mayo Clinic *(www.mayohealth.org),* the National Institutes of Health *(www.nih.gov/health)* and the Centers for Disease Control *(www.cdc.gov),* have informative websites with information about the latest medical research and recommended treatments.

■ **General Health.** Although these sites are not targeted exclusively towards seniors, they provide health information on a wide variety of topics and may lead to other valuable websites, such as *www.drkoop.com, www.thriveonline.com, www.betterhealth.com,* and *www.intelihealth.com.*

What tools are available to broaden a web search?

Search engines pull information from a variety of sources and can broaden a web search. For example, a simple search on Yahoo! *(www.yahoo.com)* for information on cataracts can yield links to more than 100 sites. These sites describe the causes, symptoms and treatments, and list clinics that perform cataract surgery. In addition to Yahoo!, other search engines include *www.hotbot.com, www.lycos.com* and *www.altavista.com.*

A note of caution: Always exercise caution when using the Internet to research health care options, gather information or find a chat room, because not all information is reliable. Major health care decisions should be made in concert with a physician.

For more information on Neighborhood Networks, contact:

✉ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
Neighborhood Networks
9300 Lee Highway
Fairfax, VA 22031-1207

Website www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org

e-mail mail@neighborhoodnetworks.org

☎ Neighborhood Networks Information Center
(888) 312-2743

TTY: (703) 934-3230

Visit our website at www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org

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